

MUNICIPAL ANNEXATION, RACE, AND LOCAL POWER:  
EVIDENCE FROM FOUR U.S. CITIES

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## **Abstract**

While the topic of municipal annexation, the process of the expansion of municipal government boundaries to include previously unincorporated areas, has been examined by sociologists, legal scholars, and public administrators, it has received little attention from urban planning researchers in spite of its clear implications for issues that urban planners have historically focused on, such as: provision of services, education, power in the planning process, etc. This thesis spatially analyzes annexations from 1970 to 2010 in Little Rock, Shreveport, Baton Rouge, and Memphis and examines the process of annexation in these cities during this time period. Presenting evidence that race was a contributing factor in these annexations, it follows other studies which have argued that the overall white proportion of a city was an important factor in annexation. Examining the history of annexation in the South and Midwest could provide another lens for understanding the hyper-localization of racial power and could further the understanding power in the planning processes. Thus, it argues further research into annexation, race, and power is needed.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction & Background**

Municipal annexation, the process expanding municipal government boundaries to include previously unincorporated areas, has important implications for the provision of government services, tax levels, and, as will be examined in this thesis, democratic representation. This process, from the perspective of power and urban planning, has been understudied in spite of its wide-ranging implications.

Research on municipal annexation has primarily focused on the economic implications and motivations of municipalities expanding their boundaries, especially in the context of municipalities seeking to recapture suburban growth at cities' peripheries in America during the mid-20th century. However, few studies have examined the political process of municipal annexations. Even fewer have addressed the political motivations of local politicians and municipal planners seeking municipal expansion.

The existing research that does address political motivations for municipal annexation point to race as an important contributing factor in the decision to annex. Specifically, research has found that local politicians have sought to maintain the current share of white voters in communities as many white families moved to the suburbs during the latter half of the 20th century (Moeser and Dennis, 1982; Austin, 1999). The relative paucity of research into the racial motivations behind annexation necessitates further research into this topic. Additionally, while annexation varies among municipalities, planning departments and agencies are often tasked with evaluating and making recommendations to government decision-makers on areas under annexation

consideration. This leaves planners with a key role in the annexation planning process and also deserves further attention.

Thus, this thesis builds upon previous research by examining the municipal annexation and voter share outcomes with respect to race in Little Rock, Arkansas; Shreveport, Louisiana; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Memphis, Tennessee between 1970 and 2010. Annexations during this time period were mapped and demographic data for each annexed area were analyzed ten years after annexation. Meeting minutes, reports, media interviews, and the municipal planners' annexation analysis were collected and analyzed for a subset of annexations to better understand the motivations behind annexation in the selected case studies. These analyses were framed using Bent Flyvbjerg's (2002) questions "Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power? Is this development desirable?" (p. 353). The historical context and review of state laws governing annexation subsections and literature review will follow the outline set out by Mary Edwards (2008) "Understanding the Complexities of Annexation" due to the clarity of her review of annexation research.

### ***Historical Context***

The first large annexations in United States history were undertaken by Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia. These cities' populations exploded in the latter half of the 19th century as a result of immigration. To accommodate the new growth, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, and other smaller cities used annexation to spread outward

(Edwards, 2008). At the end of the 19th century until World War Two, Florestano and Marando (1981) write that

“an allegiance of rural and suburban interests in legislatures generally made it harder for existing cities to annex than for new ones to incorporate independently” (p. 67).

Bromley and Smith (1973) find, in their historical analysis of the size and frequency of annexation, that there were strong regional variations in the decline of annexation during this time period.

From 1950 to 2000, the pace of annexation increased rapidly. Central cities as designated by the U.S. Census Bureau expanded their boundaries, tripling in size, from 10,604 square miles to 31,405 square miles (Rusk, 2006). It has been argued that this expansion was due to central cities trying to annex suburban growth at their peripheries (Bromley and Smith, 1973). While the amount of land annexed has declined in relation to previous decades, annexation from 2000 to present “continues to be a popular vehicle of growth” for municipal governments (Wang and Gorina, 2018).

The frequency and size of these expansions are bounded by the structure of government and abundance of unincorporated land existing in different regions in the United States. In the Northeastern United States, almost all land is incorporated. Thus, land acquired through annexation by cities in the Northeast almost always is absorbed from a neighboring municipality, limiting the ability of cities to annex. In contrast, cities in the Midwest, West, and South, often have had abundant unincorporated land on their peripheries (Edwards, 2008). For example, from 2000-2010, municipalities in the

Northeast annexed a total of 7 square miles, while municipalities in the South annexed 5,413 square miles (Wang and Gorina, 2018).

### ***Annexation and State Law***

Regional variations in state law have been hypothesized to impact the frequency and size of annexations. States regulate municipal annexation in the United States due to Dillon's rule. Dillon's rule, upheld in 1907 by the Supreme Court in *Hunter v. Pittsburgh*, states that municipalities only have powers expressly granted by the state legislature. Thus, in layman's terms, municipalities are an authorized local extension of the state government.

Sengstock (1960) developed the standard classification of state annexation laws. Annexation statutes are grouped into five stratifications based on the main method for annexation outlined by state law. Table 1 summarizes each classification.

**TABLE 1**  
**Sengstock (1960) Classification of State Annexation Laws**

<i>Legislative Determination</i>	The state legislature reviews each annexation proposal.
<i>Popular Determination</i>	Annexation is approved through local resident referendum or petition.
<i>Municipal Determination</i>	Annexation occurs through the unilateral action of local government.
<i>Judicial Determination</i>	A judge reviews and determines whether or not an annexation can occur.
<i>Quasi-legislative or Administrative Determination</i>	An independent and nonjudicial commission reviews and rules on annexations.



The most popular method of annexation outlined in state law is popular determination. Since the 1950s, more participation, whether through a majority petition, by election, or one of these and judicial review, has been required by states in the annexation process (Palmer and Lindsey, 2001). State annexation statutes in the three states (Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee) where the four case study cities are located are also generally representative of this trend.

In Tennessee, the predominant method of annexation was municipal determination from 1955 to 2014. This effectively allowed the governing body of a municipality to pass an ordinance approving the annexation, without the need for full consent of the property owners located within the annexed areas. In 2014, municipalities' ability to annex through this method sparked a statewide backlash, and the state legislature changed the statutes governing annexation to allow residents within the annexed areas to vote on the annexation (Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 2020).

In Arkansas, the predominant method of annexation was popular determination. This involved a majority petition of property owners located within the proposed annex area to the municipality for annexation. For example, if a platted area is singularly owned, that owner can petition a municipality for annexation. Next, either a referendum is held or the municipality accepts the petition and the annexation case goes before a judge. This latter judicial method of annexation was passed into state law in 1987. State law also allows municipalities a less public method of annexation if the municipality is

trying to annex land that is contiguously surrounded by a municipality's borders (Bailey, 2015).

The primary method of annexation in Louisiana has been the popular determination method since 1970. The most common process for Louisiana under this umbrella occurs when a property owner petitions a municipality to be annexed and receive municipal services (Palmer and Lindsey, 2001). Louisiana also allows for annexation by petition and referendum, petition and municipal ordinance (a simpler process when 90% of the area is contiguous to the boundary of the municipality), and annexation by petition, ordinance, and referendum. While each of the statutes governing these various forms of annexation in Louisiana is not necessary to discuss, the general process involves a percentage of property owners, usually over one third, petitioning a municipality to be annexed. Then, an election is usually held, with a simple majority required. In the case of petition and municipal ordinance, the governing body of the municipality has to vote upon the annexation and notify the public after the petition (Hebert, 2015).

While Arkansas and Louisiana had similar laws during the study period, Tennessee did not. The research on the effect of varying state laws on the frequency and size of annexations has produced conflicting results. Some studies have found that state law has a significant effect on frequency and size of annexation (Wheeler, 1965; Galloway and Landis, 1986, Liner, 1990). Dye (1964) found state law not to be significant. Carr and Feiock (2001) found that state law restricting annexation actually increased the frequency of annexation. Edwards (2008) attributes the different findings

among these studies to the inconsistent set of methodologies used. However, recent research has been consistent in its evaluation of the impact of state laws on levels of annexation. Facer II (2006) found no evidence that state laws which were designed to limit the ability of municipalities to exercise annexation power were effective in doing so. Even when differing annexation processes were examined on an intrastate level, researchers found that variables, such as a municipality's population density, income, education, and municipal expenditure, affecting annexation were the same among all methods of annexation (Smith and Willse, 2012). Thus, other factors affecting annexation aside from state law are more likely to play a larger role in the frequency and size of annexation than the legal process outlined for annexation.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This literature review will first discuss planning theory relevant to annexation. It will then address existing research on the motivations and implications of annexation. These will be split into fiscal and political, adapted from Edwards (2008) categorization of research on annexation.

Planning theory, while never directly addressing annexation, is useful in framing this thesis' analysis of annexation. For example, Molotch (1976) conceives of the city as the "areal expression of the interests of a land-based elite". Molotch's conception is especially important given the emphasis on property ownership in the municipal annexation process. Because states have made annexation more difficult over time, this could be seen as an expression of the interests of landed property owners outside of the city resisting annexation and higher taxation. Additionally, real estate developers and property owners would be expected to push for annexation of their developments due to the greater services provided by municipalities. As discussed in the introduction, this is often codified in state law, with a majority of property owners within an area seeking annexation required to initiate the annexation process.

A normative approach, espoused by Fainstein (2005), is used by this thesis due to the inherently political nature of annexation as a supposedly democratic government process. Government boundaries represent the limits of power and control and how these are viewed by the public and the interactions between the public and government entities are also inherently moralistic. Fainstein conceptualizes a "just city" as part of the Rawlsian tradition where people would choose social justice if they did not know where

in the social hierarchy they would be placed. To Fainstein, the “just city” is what planning should work toward (Fainstein, 2005).

Furthermore, Flyvbjerg (2002), through his research on power and planning, offers several questions that frame this thesis: “Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power? Is this development desirable? What should be done?” (p. 353). This thesis answers these questions with respect to municipal annexation and applies Fainstein’s framework to the last two questions. Specifically, the stated motivations of public officials and planners, the process, and the outcome regarding the demographic composition of a municipality post-annexation are examined.

### ***Motivations and Implications***

While the motivations and implications of municipal annexation are numerous and varied, this research groups them into fiscal and political, partially based on Edwards (2008) categorizations.

The historical justification for annexation is that it increased the tax base by capturing suburban population growth on a city’s peripheries. Rubin (1982) proposed a model of fiscal distress whereby an increasing proportion of a city’s residents are low-income as a result of an in-migration of poor residents and the out-migration of middle-class and upper-class residents to the suburbs. This migration theoretically increases a municipality’s expenditures and decreases its revenues. A more recent justification, in line with this theory, is that annexation allows a city to spread the tax burden over a greater number of properties and contributes to its overall fiscal health

(Edwards, 1999, 2011, 2008; Liner, 1992; Rusk, 2006). This justification begs Flyvbjerg's (2002) question, "who gains and loses?" (p. 353).

Fiscal motivations behind annexation have been theorized by a variety of researchers. However, empirical evidence testing these theories against the fiscal effects of annexation has been mixed in its support for this proposition. Rusk (2006) finds a correlation between the more feasible annexation due to the availability of unincorporated land, less complicated regulations and better municipal bond ratings. Smimova and Ingalls (2008) found that state regulations restricting the ability to annex led to a decrease in municipal tax revenues. However, Smith and Afonso (2016) found recently that annexation negatively impacted municipal budgets, debt, and debt service. Indeed, Wang and Gorina (2018) find that there is limited evidence for the positive effect of annexation on municipal finances in the United States for their study period of 2000-2010. They summarize the literature on fiscal motivations and implications of annexation succinctly: there is a "controversy between theoretical perspectives that predict positive effects of annexation on revenues and spending and rather limited empirical studies that provide mixed evidence to support these propositions" (p. 616).

Motivations and implications of annexation which are political in nature can be broken up into two sub-classifications: competitive and racially motivated annexation.

The argument that municipalities are motivated by competitive considerations can be traced back to the territorial imperative theory which hypothesized that cities are motivated to annex by the desire to control land use and box out other municipalities' ability to implement their own land use plan (Williams, 1971; Thomas, 1984). Heim

(2012) examines these motivations in Phoenix and finds anecdotal evidence which lends support to competitive considerations in annexation. Fleischmann (1986) finds that city officials in Milwaukee and San Antonio considered the potential for suburban incorporation in their decision-making. These city officials used infrastructure subsidization as a means to stimulate developer and public support for annexation in newly developing suburban communities. A recent first-of-its-kind study, which used parcel level data, finds strong evidence that competitive considerations influenced annexation on James Island in a competition between the Town of James Island and the City of Charleston (Mothorpe et. al, 2020).

The first researched case study illustrating the racial motivations and implications behind annexation was in Richmond, Virginia. In the 1960s, the city council met behind closed doors to plan for the annexation of 23 square miles and 43,000 people in Chesterfield County. As Moeser and Dennis (1982) explain in their definitive book on the subject, the Richmond case was not unique in the South but

...the struggle was made more dramatic by the tactics employed by the white leadership and its ability to conduct its annexation negotiations in secrecy for a period of five years. The small group of powerful individuals viewed the increasing numbers of black residents in the state capital with alarm, fearing that an inability to stem the growing black population would result in a black-controlled city government (page 4).

Austin (1999) constructed a median voter model based on annexation data from the 1950s and 1960s to estimate variables affecting municipalities' decision whether to annex. Austin finds that a desire to capture suburban growth at a city's peripheries was not a significant factor in annexation. Austin did find that offsetting the political and racial

effects of urban migration was an important variable in annexation decisions. Consistent with the Richmond case, Austin finds that city politicians

used annexation to increase the proportion of white voters and dilute non-whites' voting power. Thus migration's effect on racial balance seems to spur a broad annexation effort, but a specific desire to bring in exclusively white areas did not motivate annexation (p. 528).

Municipal underbounding, which is the practice of excluding minority groups living in unincorporated areas from being annexed by a city, could transitively be understood to provide evidence of race being a factor in municipal annexation. The most extensive study of municipal underbounding, which examined Southern communities, finds that "predominantly white communities were much less likely to annex black populations, even when [researchers] controlled for the size of the black fringe population at risk of annexation" (Litcher et. al, 2007, p. 1). On the other hand, when examining municipal underbounding with respect to Latinx populations in the Midwest, Wilson and Edwards (2004) found little evidence of the practice of municipal underbounding. While some of these studies provide evidence for race being a motivating factor in annexation, the topic has been surprisingly understudied, especially given the equity implications that might result from annexation.

Importantly, many annexation studies' emphasis on isolating specific factors motivating annexation seems to miss the systemic connections between race, economics, and U.S. urban and suburban development policy of the 20th century. Even if all studies find that fiscal impacts of capturing suburban growth at cities' peripheries was the predominant concern of city officials in deciding which areas to annex and that



city officials were race-blind, resulting outcomes from such a focus would still predict that non-white groups would have their voting power in city elections diluted due to historical inequalities in economic mobility and accessing suburban residency. This study addresses this lack of connection by examining these topics further.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design**

### ***Research Questions***

The overarching research question is to what extent race was a factor in annexing areas in Little Rock, Memphis, Shreveport, and Baton Rouge. It also describes what the means of annexation in each city and what methods planners used to evaluate potential annexations and the frequency of evaluation if this was part of annexation. Relating to the process oriented questions, if an annexation was put before voters, what were the results of such an election? Finally, it seeks to illuminate the process for measuring outcomes of annexation and to what extent these match the stated motivations in each case study city.

### ***Methodology***

This thesis involved multiple methods of research. A review of municipal code governing annexation for each municipality was conducted. Concurrently, annexation data from 1970 to 2010 was collected from the municipal governments of Shreveport, Baton Rouge, Memphis, and Little Rock. This data included annexation analyses, and maps and shapefiles of the annexations. The annexation analyses and municipal code were analyzed using a normative framework as well as Flyvbjerg's questions as described in the literature review.

A proportional split methodology was used that followed that outlined by Schlossberg (2003). Historical census data on total population and population by race per census tract from 1970 to 2010 was collected, proportionally split and then joined to

the annexation boundary files. Percentages of white and black populations were calculated for the city boundary before the annexations of that decade and all annexed areas during that decade from aggregated population numbers per decade.

Percentages using aggregate numbers were calculated due to Austin's (1999) findings which showed that the decline in the percentage white population of a municipality was a significant factor in increasing the frequency of annexation. Percentages of white and black populations were also calculated for each annexation.

Because the census is only conducted once every ten years, the census numbers preceding and postceding the annexation were used. For example, if an annexation occurred in 1978, the proportionally split 1970 and 1980 census data was used separately for calculating the total population, white population, and black population for that annexation. The preceding decennial census numbers are shown in the results. The postceding decennial census numbers are shown in the appendix. Both the preceding decennial census numbers and the postceding decennial census numbers produced similar percentages.

Due to the paucity of documentation relating to specific annexations, only one case study annexation was examined due to litigation which arose in response to the proposed annexation and the resultant reporting on said annexation. This annexation took place in Memphis from 1987 to 1998 in an area called Hickory Hill.

One semi-structured interview with an urban planner from one of the case study cities who was working during the relevant period was conducted. All other interview requests were rejected. Interview questions asked about the analysis performed on

annexations and the motivations behind such annexations. Interview questions are included in the appendix.

## Chapter 4: Results

### *Spatial Analysis*

Between 1970 and 2010, 703 annexations were accomplished by Little Rock, Memphis, Baton Rouge, and Shreveport. Collectively, these cities annexed around 270 square miles of land. Across all case study cities, the area annexed and frequency of annexation decreased each decade. Nonetheless, Little Rock, Shreveport, and Baton Rouge doubled or nearly doubled in size between 1970 and 2010. Population, relative to the previous population size, of annexed areas was never more than 35% of the previous city area's population at the time of annexation. There is significant variation between the case study cities in frequency, size, and population of annexed areas.

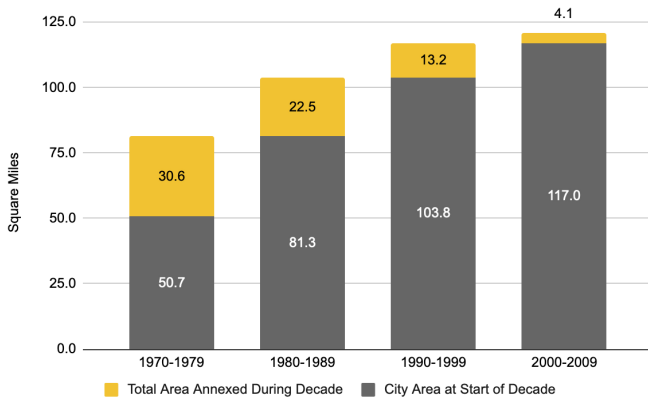
During the selected time period, Little Rock completed 213 annexations totaling 70.4 square miles of land, which more than doubled the land area of the city. The average area per annexation was 0.3 square miles. The population added by these additions totaled approximately 53,443 people per the estimation method. The average population per annexation is approximately 236 people. The frequency, size, and population of annexed areas at the start of the decade declined each decade for Little Rock.

**TABLE 2**  
**Little Rock Annexation Frequency Over Time**

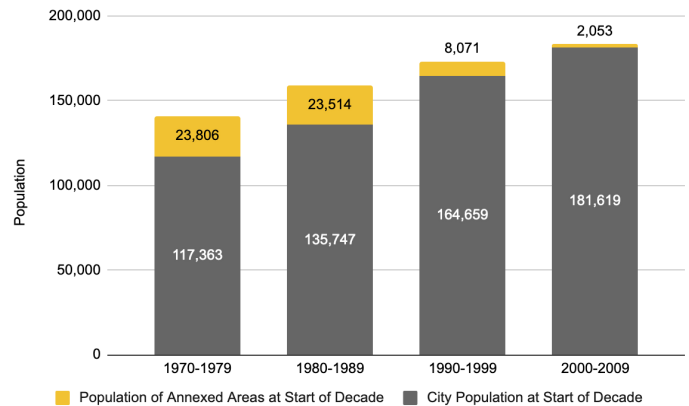
<b>Year</b>	<b>Annexations</b>
1970-1979	117
1980-1989	45
1990-1999	26
2000-2009	25
Total	213

**FIGURE 1**  
**Little Rock City Area Growth & Population Over Time**

**a. Area Growth**



**b. Population**



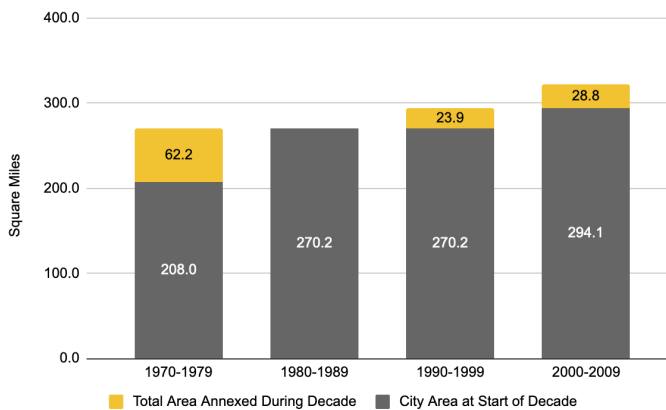
32 annexations were completed during the selected time period in Memphis, totaling 114.9 square miles of land. 3.59 square miles was the average area per annexation. This increased the land area of Memphis by around 50 percent. The population added by these additions totaled approximately 181,466 people per the estimation method. The average population per annexation is approximately 3944 people. The frequency of annexation, area annexed each decade, and population of annexed areas at the start of each decade in Memphis varied across time, with no annexations occurring from 1980 to 1989.

**TABLE 3**  
**Memphis Annexation Frequency Over Time**

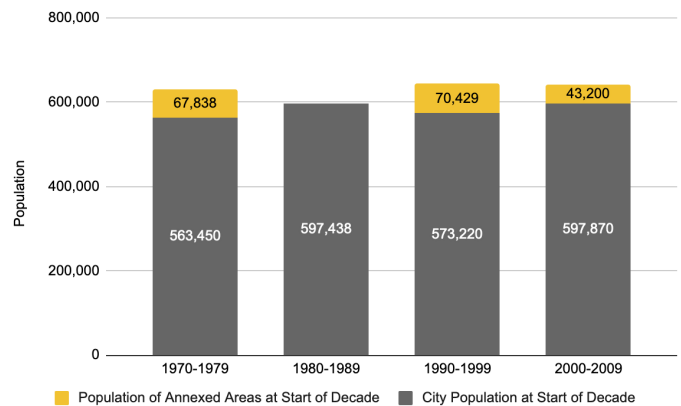
Year	Annexations
1970-1979	13
1980-1989	0
1990-1999	9
2000-2009	10
Total	32

**FIGURE 2**  
**Memphis City Area Growth & Population Over Time**

**a. Area Growth**



**b. Population**



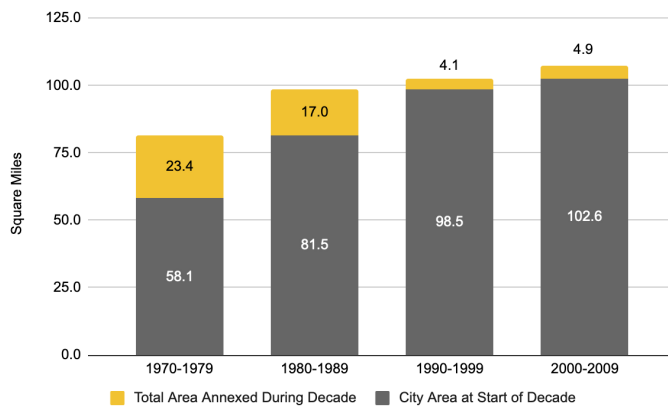
Totaling 49.4 square miles of land, Shreveport completed 383 annexations, which almost doubled the land area of the city. The average area per annexation was 0.13 square miles. The population added by these additions totaled approximately 39,910 people per the estimation method. The average population per annexation is approximately 89 people. Since 1980 to 1989, annexation in Shreveport has declined. The area annexed each decade and the population of annexed areas at the start of each decade has also declined.

**TABLE 4**  
**Shreveport Annexation Frequency Over Time**

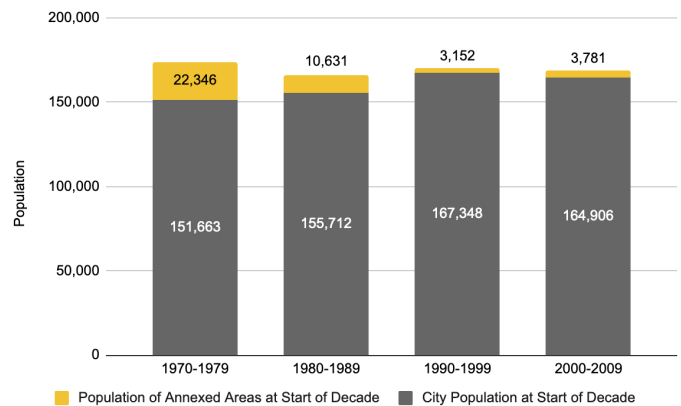
Year	Annexations
1970-1979	108
1980-1989	146
1990-1999	67
2000-2009	62
Total	383

**FIGURE 3**  
**Shreveport City Area Growth & Population Over Time**

**a. Area Growth**



**b. Population**



Baton Rouge completed 75 annexations totaling 37 square miles of land, which more than doubled the land area of the city. The average area per annexation was 0.49 square miles. The population added by these additions totaled approximately 72,645 people per the estimation method. The average population per annexation is approximately 762 people. The frequency of annexation, area annexed, and population of annexed areas at the start of each decade declined over time.

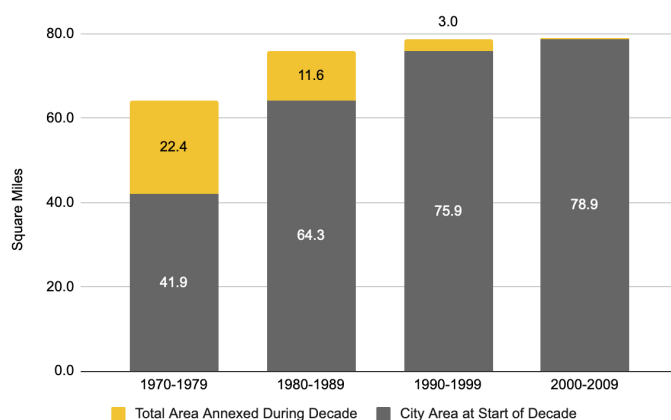


**TABLE 5**  
**Baton Rouge Annexation Frequency Over Time**

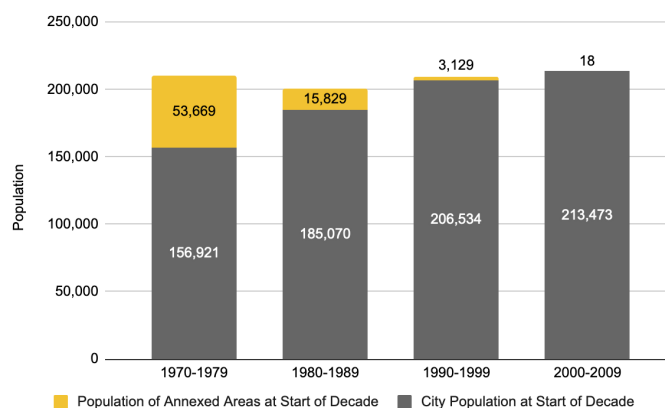
Year	Annexations
1970-1979	52
1980-1989	13
1990-1999	7
2000-2009	3
Total	75

**FIGURE 4**  
**Baton Rouge City Area Growth & Population Over Time**

**a. Area Growth**

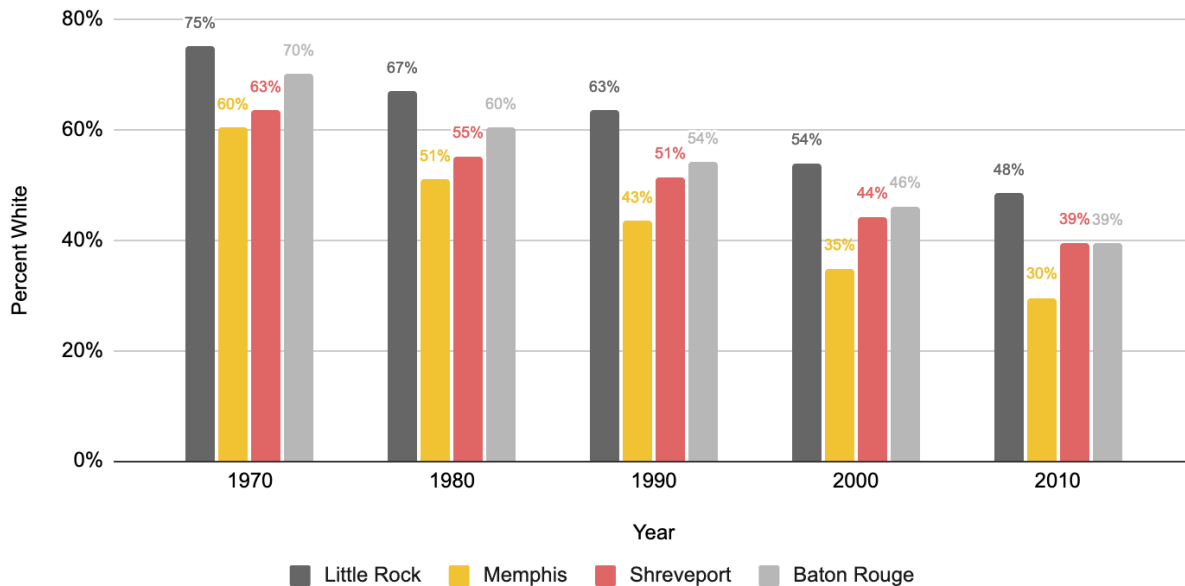


**b. Population**



Given the trends per city, the analysis next includes an estimation of the racial breakdown of these collected annexations. In each case study city, the proportion of the population that is white declined during each decade. This ranged from a 24 percent decline in Shreveport to a 41 percent decline in Baton Rouge.

**FIGURE 5**  
**City Proportion White Over Time**



In Little Rock and Memphis, for every decade in which annexations occurred, the proportion of population in annexed areas at the start of the decade that was white was higher than that of the proportion of white population in the city at the start of the decade.

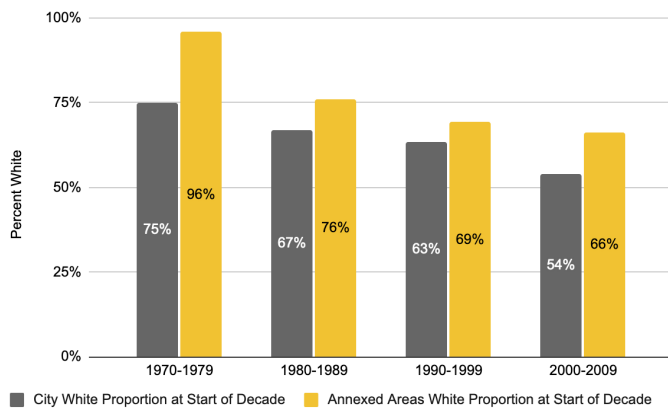
In Shreveport, this is also true for 1980 to 2009 but not true from 1970 to 1979. It is unclear why 1970 to 1979 was dissimilar to the other decades. For Baton Rouge, this is true for 1980 to 2009 but not true for 1970 to 1979. From 1990 to 1999, the difference between the city white proportion at the start of the decade and the annexed areas white proportion at the start of the decade It is also unclear why 1970 to 1979 was dissimilar to the other decades.

These findings indicate that in Little Rock, Shreveport, and Memphis that the percentage of the city which was white was increased by annexing surrounding areas.

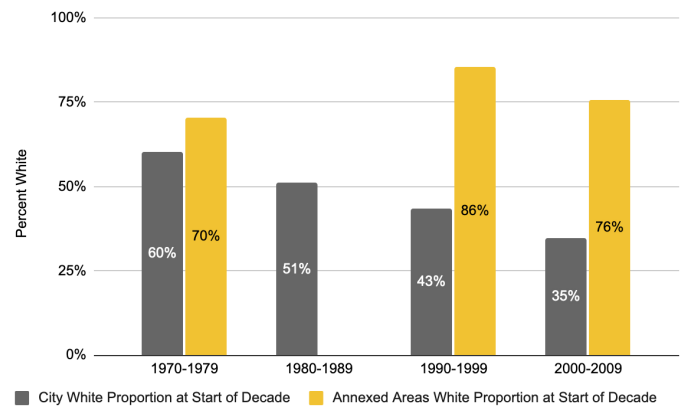
However, the population in annexed areas was small. Thus it is unclear the difference that these annexations made in terms of the overall change in proportion white for each city.

**FIGURE 6**  
**City and Annexations Proportion White Over Time**

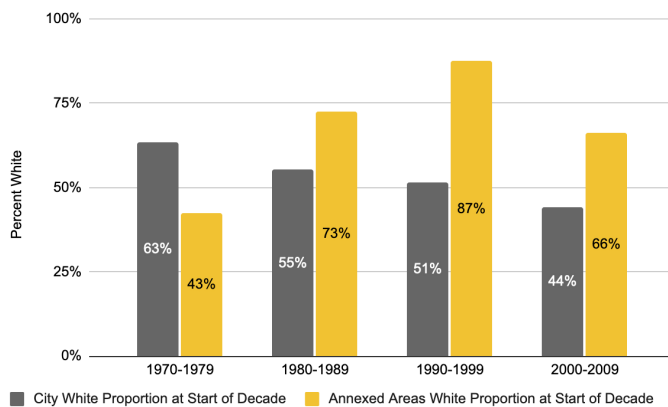
**a. Little Rock**



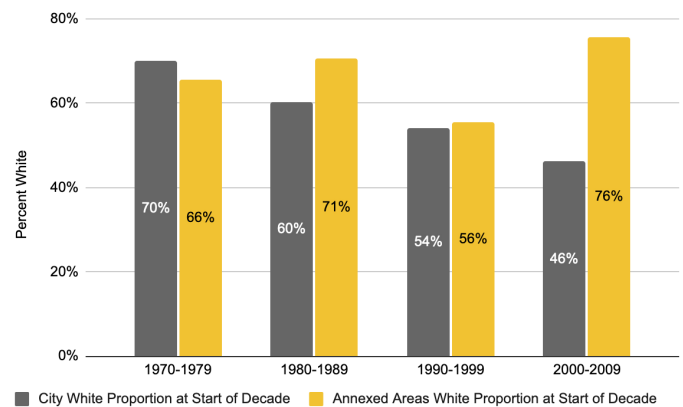
**b. Memphis**



**c. Shreveport**



**d. Baton Rouge**



## ***Municipal Annexation Process & Interviews***

The annexation process varies in each of the selected case study cities. All case study cities are required to follow state regulations outlined earlier. How each city implements state regulations and the procedures they use to evaluate annexations is often opaque. Only one semi-structured interview was conducted with regards to the process and evaluation of annexation in each city. The lack of interview request responses was likely due to annexation becoming a politically charged topic in three of the four case study cities. However, the process and evaluation of annexation in each city was gathered from municipal documents outlining the process (Code of Ordinances City of Little Rock, Arkansas, 1988; Code of Ordinances City of Shreveport, Louisiana, 1993; Code of Ordinances City of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1983; Code of Ordinances City of Memphis, Tennessee, 2012 re-publication).

The general process of annexation was similar for Little Rock, Baton Rouge, and Shreveport. A group of property owners petition the city government to be annexed. Then the annexation request is reviewed by either a city lawyer (Baton Rouge), or evaluated by the municipal planners (Little Rock and Shreveport). Afterwards, in Shreveport and Baton Rouge it goes before the city council to be voted on. In Little Rock, the proposed annexation is reviewed by a judge before approval. The amount of time each process requires varies based upon the amount of time the judicial review process takes or the length of time required to vote upon the annexation. All case study city governing bodies can pass ordinances annexing unincorporated and contiguous land. However, voluntary annexation, whereby a property owner petitions the city

government to be annexed, is the most common form of annexation in Little Rock, Shreveport, and Baton Rouge.

In each of the three cities, the annexation evaluation process is different. In Little Rock, the planning department asks the wastewater, fire, and police departments if the proposed annexation can be serviced by these departments. Importantly, these departments evaluate the property as it currently exists without any forward projections, even if a development is planned on the property. If each department agrees that the property can be serviced, the annexation goes before a judge for review.

In Baton Rouge, evaluation consists of the East Baton Rouge Parish and Baton Rouge consolidated government's attorney evaluating the annexation for compliance with development codes and existing law. There is no evaluation in terms of providing infrastructure and services in the annexed area. Then, the attorney submits the annexation to the Metropolitan Council for approval.

In Shreveport, the Metropolitan Planning Commission evaluates the impact on annexation to the city and then also coordinates the planned provision of services with other city agencies. It then sends the annexation petition, map, and comments to the Metropolitan Planning Commission Board. The Metropolitan Planning Commission Board then either approves, denies, or approves the annexation with conditions. If approved, the annexation is sent to the city council for approval.

In Memphis, the most common form of annexation was by municipal ordinance. Under this process, an annexation was proposed by the city. A study of the area to be annexed was completed and public hearing was scheduled in front of the governing

body. Public notice of the hearing was required to be given seven days before the hearing. A plan of service for the annexed area was required to be completed and also required a public hearing on said plan of service. Afterwards, Memphis could pass an ordinance annexing the area and a judge would review the ordinance. This process is notable in that it required public hearings for each annexation.

In three of the four case study cities, little public involvement was required before annexation. As illuminated during the one interview completed, the interviewee, who is an urban planner, stated that annexation was a “quiet process”. The interviewee also posited that “Is it possible for annexation to get all the way through the process without anyone knowing? Absolutely.” Additionally, the urban planner was told by city administrators that they should never advise against annexation.

In each city, there was not a clear requirement for follow up evaluation required at any point in the future after annexation. The interviewee also stated that no follow up evaluation was conducted after annexing an area. In Memphis, a plan of service is required for each annexed area. However, there is no mechanism to enforce that plan of service, nor is there a follow up evaluation to determine whether the plan of service was followed.

### ***Annexation Case Study: Hickory Hill, Memphis***

In 1987, the City of Memphis initiated an annexation through ordinance of an area called Hickory Hill, located in southeastern Memphis. As described above, under previous Tennessee law, the city was allowed to initiate annexation by ordinance with

little public involvement, only requiring a public hearing prior to annexation. The ordinance was challenged in court by a coalition of residents called Hickory Hill Residents for Tomorrow who raised money to hire a lawyer. For the next eleven years, the legal challenge to the annexation worked its way through Tennessee courts. In 1997, the area even tried to incorporate as a separate municipality under Tennessee's previous "Toy Town" law which was then struck down in the same year by Tennessee's Supreme Court. In 1998, the group finally settled with the City of Memphis. The settlement deal required the City of Memphis to earmark tax revenue generated from the community for the community and stipulated that the City build new schools in the area as per the plan of service (Shepard, 2002).

The lawyer hired by Hickory Hill Residents for Tomorrow, Dan Norwood, thought that the primary issue surrounding the annexation was education, namely school busing. Norwood stated

"I'm a big believer in city schools, but Memphis City Schools has a huge burden of poverty...people base their choices on perceptions. We know people have left the city because of schools. First it was busing, and then there was no confidence that the city wouldn't bring its problems to you through annexation" (Shepard, 2002, p. 2).

This area, per the estimation method described above, was 89 percent white in 1980. By 2000, it was 34 percent.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion & Conclusion**

### ***Discussion***

Based on the results, this thesis finds that there is evidence of race being a factor in annexation in Little Rock, Memphis, and Shreveport. In each of these cities and in the majority of the four decades examined, annexed areas were a higher proportion white than previous city boundaries. In Baton Rouge, three of the decades examined were decades in which the annexed areas were a higher percentage white than previous city boundaries. However, from 1990 to 1999, the percent differential between the annexed areas proportion white and the city proportion white was only 2 percent versus 5 percent or greater for every other decade in each city.

This indicates that in Little Rock, Shreveport, and Memphis the percentage of the city which was white was increased by annexing surrounding areas. Trying to increase the share of the white population was posited to be a primary factor in the annexation of Hickory Hill (Bradley, 2019). Indeed,

“broader public opinion also saw annexation as political. Absorbing Southeast Memphis would have restored the city's white majority. White voters were more likely to back white politicians” (Bradley, 2019, p. 1).

The analysis indicates that in each decade, as Memphis, Little Rock, and Shreveport annexed outwards to follow white populations, the areas annexed in previous decades became, on the whole, less white. Interestingly, this might indicate that annexation, in part, drove white flight. In particular, this could be a relatively understudied aspect of white flight during the selected time period.



While the reasons for white flight from central cities are known and well studied, this thesis provides further evidence that integrated schooling, brought on by annexation, was a motivating factor for white population movement. During the Hickory Hill annexation, the lawyer hired by the majority white community to litigate against annexation said that, while police patrols and tax collection were issues raised, the primary issue was school busing (Shepard, 2002). Unfortunately, because annexation is a quiet process, well-reported examples such as the Hickory Hill annexation are difficult to find. Indeed, the Hickory Hill annexation only became publicly visible because it was litigated in courts for nearly a decade. Thus, triangulating the reasons for annexation and patterns found in this thesis are an area for further research.

There could be many reasons why Baton Rouge does not as closely follow the pattern of annexation in the other case study cities. Most likely, it is because Baton Rouge has a city-county consolidated government with East Baton Rouge Parish. Thus, any annexation by the city of Baton Rouge does not provide substantially different services, levels of taxation, and school choice that annexations in the other case study cities do.

Implications for planning practice that arise from this research relate to the importance of understanding racial voter share changes that occur during annexation. The focus on providing a plan of services in the city of Memphis for annexed areas could distract from the needs of pre-existing areas of the city. This is especially true if, as shown in this research, the populations in annexed areas have structural advantages arising from racial privilege. This clearly relates to Fainstein's (2005) conception of the

just city. If annexation is, regardless of motivation, focusing resources towards white populations who already have systemic advantages, then this would not reflect that conception.

As seen in the lack of follow-up evaluation that occurs in the case study cities with regard to annexation, a more longitudinal evaluation of annexations could be beneficial in, at the very least, providing a more thorough analysis to inform future annexation. Additionally, the push in the last decade for de-annexation in Shreveport, Baton Rouge, and Memphis could be seen as the failure of urban planners and government officials to successfully connect and advocate for the importance of regional planning and government consolidation in combating racial inequity (Clark, 2019; Starr, 2019; Suriani, 2020).

Furthermore, annexation is relevant in the context of planning theory. Annexation clearly relates to all planning theories addressed in the literature review. For example, Molotch's (1976) conception of the city as the areal representation of the interests of property owners is reflected in the response to annexation. The interviewee stated that real estate developers would often seek annexation prior to development of their properties, in order to secure future municipal maintenance of sewer and water systems even though the developers were responsible for the initial construction of these systems. Because the city only evaluated present service needs, not evaluating projected service needs, and because of the city's unconditional support for annexation, annexations occurred with little analysis of the cost of these developments going forward. This begs Flyvbjerg's (2002) questions of who gains and who loses through

annexation, especially in the context of the findings of this thesis. Clearly, if the city is not evaluating how these annexations affect tax revenues, services, and voter shares over the long term, it is more difficult to determine equity implications which are the concern of Fainstein's (2005) just city.

Implications and directions for future planning research abound. Annexation can be seen in the context of hyper-localized actions of racial power. This is true both in terms of planning history and the present. Annexation policy can be seen at the confluence of many areas of interest to planners such as provision of services but the results and implications of the evidence presented in this thesis point to many studies that could be conducted around annexation and power in the planning process.

## ***Conclusion***

The results of this thesis point to race as an important contributing factor in annexation during 1970 to 2010 in Shreveport, Memphis, and Little Rock. Additionally, the evidence presented in this thesis provides an illustration of the hyper-localization of racial power in the planning and annexation process. In spite of the racial equity and power implications with regard to annexation, annexation remains an under-studied topic both within planning research and practice. Continued issues surrounding annexation in Baton Rouge, Shreveport, and Memphis, along with the evidence presented in this thesis, illuminate the importance of continuing research into this topic.

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## **Appendix**

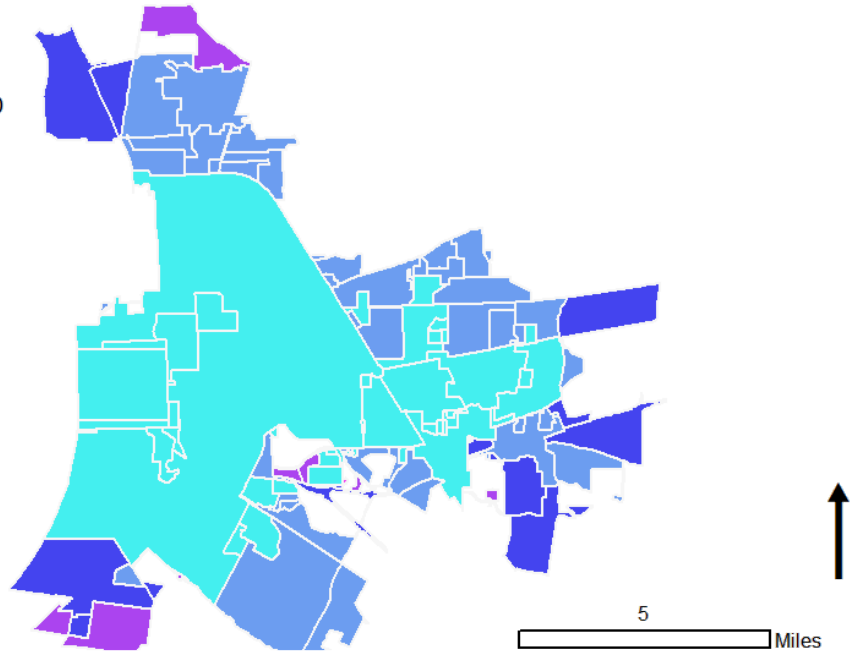
### ***Interview Questions***

1. What is your title?
2. How long were you involved in annexation in [relevant city]?
3. What was the process for an area to be annexed, as you understood it?
4. What was your role in the process?
5. Using the following scale, to what extent do you agree with the following statements:
  - a. There was consensus among public officials regarding the reasons supporting annexation.
  - b. There was consensus among my colleagues for or against annexation.Strongly Agree <-----> Strongly Disagree
6. Were there any areas that were under consideration to be annexed but were not?
  - a. If so, what was the reasoning behind not annexing the areas?

## Baton Rouge Annexations By Decade 1970-2010

### Decade of Annexation

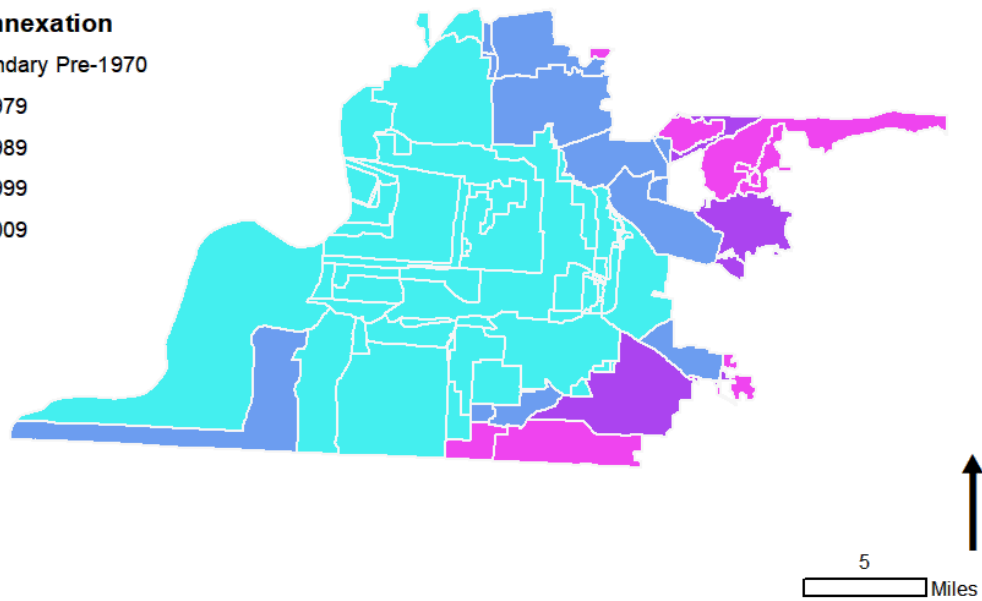
- City Boundary Pre-1970
- 1970 - 1979
- 1980 - 1989
- 1990 - 1999
- 2000 - 2009



## Memphis Annexations By Decade 1970-2010

### Decade of Annexation

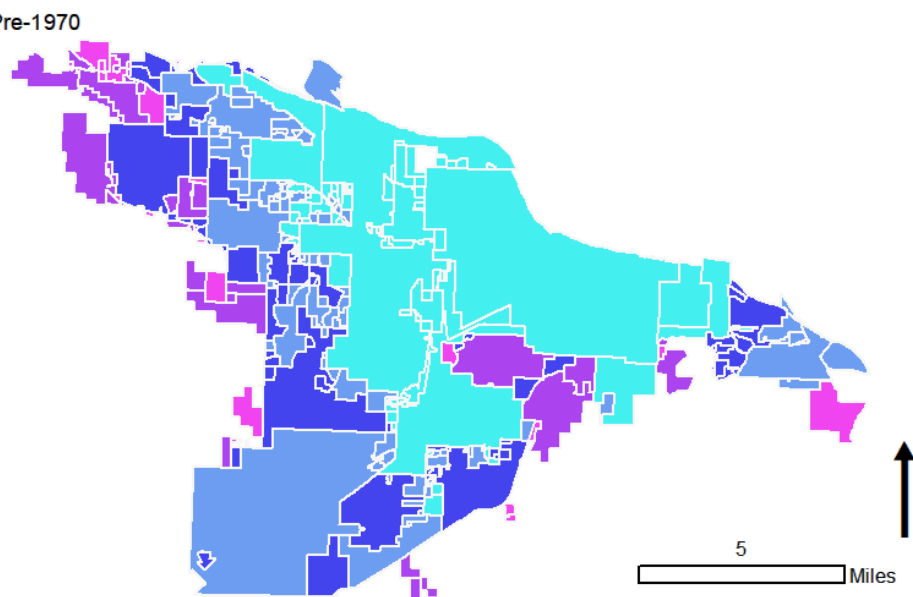
- City Boundary Pre-1970
- 1970 - 1979
- 1980 - 1989
- 1990 - 1999
- 2000 - 2009



## Little Rock Annexations By Decade 1970-2010

### Decade of Annexation

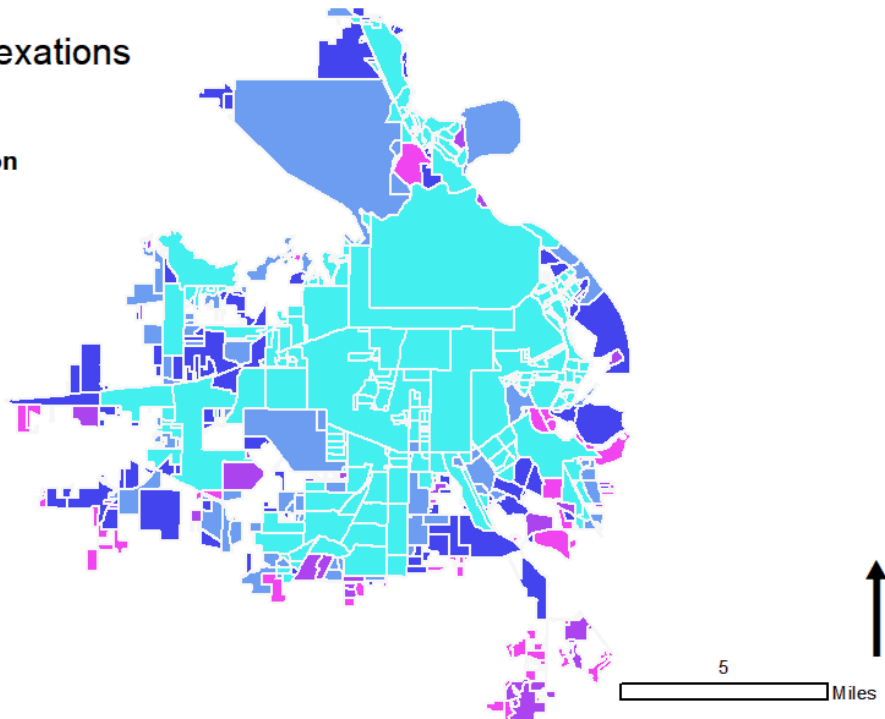
- City Boundary Pre-1970
- 1970-1979
- 1980-1989
- 1990-1999
- 2000-2009



## Shreveport Annexations By Decade

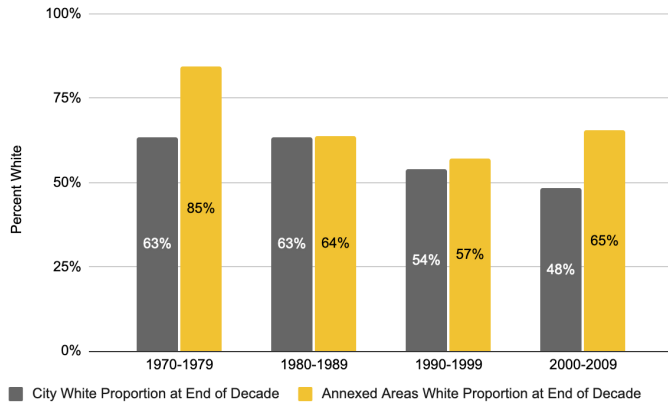
### Decade of Annexation

- Pre 1970
- 1970-1979
- 1980-1989
- 1990-1999
- 2000-2009

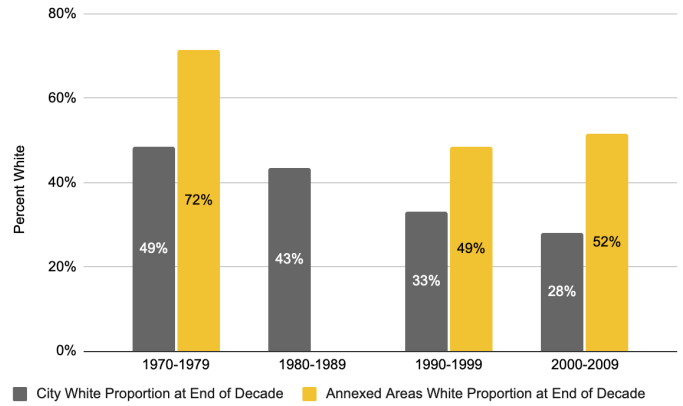


**FIGURE 7**  
**City and Annexations Proportion White Over Time**

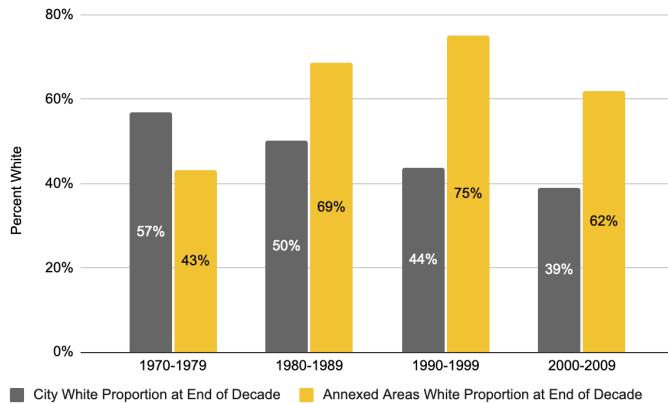
**e. Little Rock**



**f. Memphis**



**g. Shreveport**



**h. Baton Rouge**

